

NEWS RELEASE

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
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Forest Service Geothermal Leasing Decision Announced

SPARKS, Nevada...Jeanne Higgins, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Supervisor, signed a decision on February 15, 2012, to consent to geothermal leasing of 25 sections (12,809 acres) within the Aurora area of the Bridgeport Ranger District in Mineral County, Nevada.

The decision includes stipulations and lease notices to provide protection to natural and cultural resources. The sections are located about 20 miles southwest of Hawthorne, Nevada and 20 miles east of Bridgeport, California, near the Nevada-California border.

"I have carefully considered the needs of sustaining and conserving forest resources, while providing for renewable geothermal development," said Higgins. "We have listened to the input we received from those that were engaged in this process," continued Higgins. "I feel that this decision fairly balances the issues and interests," said Higgins.

"This decision consents to leasing, and would allow the BLM to move forward with issuing non-competitive leases for these sections," explained Higgins. Other key elements of this decision that will carry into the next step of the leasing process include the following:

- Stipulations and lease notices would become part of any lease issued to ensure resource protection.
- The decision to consent to leasing itself is non-ground disturbing and has no direct impact to natural and cultural resources.
- Any future ground-disturbing exploration and development geothermal activities proposed by the lessee would require on-the-ground surveys and additional environmental analysis.
- A more restrictive stipulation has been added to protect priority habitat for the bi-state distinct population segment of sage grouse; this stipulation will not allow surface occupancy on lands within its priority habitat nor within three miles of an active sage-grouse lek. (A No Surface Occupancy stipulation means that disturbing and occupying the land surface for mineral exploration or development is prohibited to protect cultural and natural resources. A lek is an area where males of a species, such as the sage grouse, gather for competitive mating). Lease notices are also in place to further limit impacts to the bi-state sage-grouse population. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is scheduled to make an Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing decision on the population by the end of 2013.

- Other stipulations and lease notices in this decision provide protection for Lahontan cutthroat trout habitat, steep slopes, cultural resources, plant and wildlife species, inventoried roadless areas, visual resources, recreation, historic properties, and Native American concerns.

The decision is subject to Forest Service Appeal regulations (36 Code of Federal Regulations 215), including a 45-day appeal period dating from publication of the legal notice. Upon completion of the appeal process, the BLM has the authority to issue geothermal leases. The environmental analysis under which this decision was made supplements the 2006 Carson City Field Office *Geothermal Leasing Environmental Assessment*.

Learn more about this release by contacting either Jeanne Higgins, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Supervisor, at 775-355-5310 or Mike Crawley, Bridgeport District Ranger, at 760-932-7070. Additional project information is located on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest website at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/htnf/>.